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AUTHOR Thompson, Mary L.
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ABSTRACT

A change process described in the work of Yochelson and Samenow was adapted to students committed as delinquents to a state correctional facility. Their criminal profile accurately described the majority of the offenders. While minor problems continued, their frequency was reduced by as much as nine times. Serious incidents occurred only after the student terminated his contract. Meeting with the change agents almost daily and being held accountable for all choices seemed to act as an effective, immediate deterrent. (BN)

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CLINICAL APPLICATION OF "THE CHANGE PROCESS"

Mary L. Thompson, M.S.W.
Maple Lane School
Centralia, Wash.

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INTRODUCTION:

Maple Lane School is a state correctional facility for male and female offenders, who have been adjudicated and committed as delinquents to the Department of Social and Health Services. As a general rule, the youth are placed at this agency because they are in need of an academic high school program. The school is considered to be a moderately secure setting for boys: there is a locked, self-contained program for girls. The residents are assigned to their respective living units (cottages) on the basis of maintaining relatively the same numerical population in each.

The basic milieu of the program is an amalgam of reality therapy, behavioral reinforcement techniques, casework counseling and routine institutional/custodial practices. Such things as being law-abiding, planning long-range, being sensitive to the needs of others, being honest, placing personal gratification in proper perspective are topics of discussion between staff and students in any cottage, on any given day. In this respect, there is high compatability between the objective of teaching responsible thinking and the "culture" of the agency.

Several staff members became acquainted with the work of Yochelson and Samenow in the summer of 1977 from reading The Criminal Personality, and from attending a one-day presentation by Dr. Samenow. Two Group Life Counselors (GLC) and the Social Worker on one cottage decided to explore the use of the change process described in Volume II, as it could be adapted to their students within the constraints of the cottage program.

OFFENDER DATA:

N White; age 15 yrs. 2 mos.; in residence seven months.
Classified as a moderately serious offender with a designated length of stay of 9 to 15 months. Known to the Juvenile Court for periodic referrals over the past six years. Committed for three counts of auto theft.
N's institutional adjustment was characterized by a lack of motivation, exploitation of peers, frequent disciplinary situations (one instance of drug involvement), and a personable/manipulative approach to adults. He was essentially "ordered" by the Planning Board to meet with the two cottage counselors while they presented their approach. Contact was to continue until the counselors were satisfied that N was making an "informed choice" about continuing or discontinuing the program. The sessions were seven days a week with one or both of the counselors. This coercion defined the attempt as a power struggle; and after meeting forty-three days, N's decision to not work for change was accepted.

S White; age 17 yrs. 5 mos.; in residence seven months.
Classified as a serious offender for aiding and abetting an armed robbery - with a set length of stay of 15 to 25 months. Known to the Juvenile Court on two previous referrals (three years apart): one not substantiated and the other handled informally (bicycle theft).
S's institutional adjustment was rated as superior. He was accepting of adult authority, complied with the rules (one exception), worked at his level of ability in school, rare involvement in disciplinary situations, operated independently from peers, and had a good work record on the grounds crew.
The contract was willingly accepted as it was a condition of S being able to live at home on a series of furloughs from the institution. He viewed the counseling aspect of the program as a form of taking extra precautions to make sure he would never be involved in a crime again; even though S was positive that he would never repeat the same errors in judgment or allow himself to make a similar mistake.
S met with the social worker once a week for approximately two hours, until his discharge seven months later. At the end of three months the approach was discontinued in favor of a more supportive focus. This was in response to S's apparent need and the assessment that S was not a "criminal personality".

A White; age 16 yrs. 11 mos.; in residence one month.
Classified as a moderately serious offender with a 9 to 15 month stay. Four year history with the Juvenile Court for referrals including indecent exposure (10 +), burglary (17 +), and auto theft(3). A had previously spent one year in a state forestry camp; and then five weeks in a state group home, before a series of burglaries and auto thefts resulted in his recommitment.
A's institutional adjustment was conforming. He maintained a low profile, did well academically and was suspected of rifling teachers' desks.
A entered into the treatment agreement with the same statements about "wanting to change", as had helped him avoid placement at

the other state institution for older offenders, which is a more physically secure setting. A indicated that this was his second time around in the system; and that his age upon release would preclude his being handled as a juvenile again.
A met with one of the counselors and the social worker once a week, for three weeks in a preparation phase. He terminated the program three weeks later (after 15 sessions), when the counselor insisted upon his writing a log of his thinking and confronted him with the view that he was exploiting his girlfriend. A maintained that he had gained sufficient insight to know what he needed to do to avoid future legal difficulty.

M Black; age 17 yrs. 11 mos.; in residence six weeks.
Classified as a less serious offender with a set stay of 4.5 to 7.5 months. Known to the Juvenile Court for less than one year: committed for four counts of auto theft.
M's institutional adjustment was described as easily offended, explosive temper, physically aggressive and threatening toward peers, one instance of drug involvement, and "hustling" several girls on campus. M's stated concerns were that he would not be able to tolerate confinement if ever incarcerated as an adult; and that if he did not alter his life style, it was highly likely that his aggression would lead to his being killed. M's girlfriend was due to deliver his child within the next four to six weeks, and M wanted to be "a good father" and get into a position to support them.
M terminated at the end of six weeks (thirty-three sessions): He had learned enough to go on his own. This coincided with conflict between M and the counselor over the structuring of M's time and the fact that appointments were set during evening basketball practice. M had also been turned down on a request to visit his girlfriend in the hospital and was aware that he would not be considered for parole at his minimum.

E White; 16 yrs. 5 mos.; in residence eleven months.
Classified as a serious offender for aiding and abetting an armed robbery, with a length of stay set at 15 to 25 months. Juvenile Court history of one year for referrals of car prowl, possession of marijuana, burglary and runaway. E indicated that he and the other offenders planned on a cross-country spree if they had not been apprehended.
E's institutional adjustment included frequent acts of physical assault, one escape, possession of pot (twice), trying to establish self as a delinquent leader, and a daily disciplinary problem.
E sought out the social worker during a brief monastic period and expressed a desire to change, as he was getting nowhere the way he was. He was interested in earning privileges so that he could attend his sister's wedding and wanted to work for parole at the time of his minimum.
Five consecutive days of two-hour sessions were spent with E in a preparation phase. Four weeks later, E declined keeping his appointment. He subsequently cancelled his contract with the explanation that he had destroyed his log when angry with a staff person and that he "knew all that stuff, anyway".

O White; age 16 yrs. 8 mos.; in residence six months.

O Classified as a serious offender for aiding and abetting an armed robbery, with an 18 to 30 month stay. Known to the Juvenile Court for 4 and 1/2 years for five burglaries and third degree theft. Committed to a forestry camp, O had been paroled after five months in view of his excellent adjustment. His parole status was revoked six months later for not complying with parole supervision and auto theft.
O's institutional adjustment: two escapes, two incidents of drug involvement, suspected of additional burglary while AWOL, not performing at level of ability in school, number one delinquent leader in cottage group, and considered to be a "con artist".
O's indication of interest in participating in a program for change occurred shortly after returning from his second escape. The classification system had just been adopted and O was faced with a set period of confinement around which he could not manipulate. His transfer to a maximum security facility was under staff discussion. O indicated that since he could not get a release within the near future, he might as well work on making the changes he knew he would eventually have to make.
O feared physical/homosexual abuse in prison; and did not believe he could operate there as "people didn't care whether you get helped, or not".
Three weeks of daily sessions were spent in a preparation phase. An early degree of external support was created by the Planning Board recommendation that O remain at Maple Lane only as long as he remained violation free and was investing in the change program. O and the social worker met five times a week for the next three months. The work came to an abrupt halt when O's release was mandated by a successful legal challenge to his classification and accompanying change in length of stay.

APPROACH:

The preliminary phase includes establishing the facts about the offender and his way of life. This is primarily accomplished through the therapist making a series of statements ("Isn't it true that .....") to elicit agreement or disagreement about patterns and errors outlined in Volume I. Once "the record" is set straight between the student and the therapist, concurrence about the offender's three options is established: 1) change; 2) stay the same; or 3)try to escape from the results of not choosing the first alternative.

The change agent then engages in a form of denoument; clarifying the nature and limits of interest in the offender. There are measured statements regarding the lack of esteem for the offender and people like him; and a verbal indictment of the grief he has caused already in his

brief life span. His belief that he is basically a good person is confronted; as well as all the "reasons" for his delinquent behavior.

The third segment is to clarify all aspects of the treatment contract. Considerable care is given to specifying what will be expected from the offender, what can be expected from the therapist and under what conditions the work will be discontinued. Since both answer to the immediate social system of the agency, it is necessary to elaborate how the student may quit the program without facing sanctions because of his choice; and yet experience eventual consequences because he has not utilized this opportunity to change.

A continuum of behavior is described, with the saints and the mafia at either end. The offender has clearly been operating in the more socially irresponsible range, as evidenced by his very commitment. The offender must acknowledge that of the two people in this endeavor, the therapist is the "expert" on socially responsible thinking and is in the position of being able to teach him what "straight" people are really like.

The therapist expresses the assurance that the offender will change if he sticks with the program; and at the same time knows that it will be months of work before he truly will be in the process of changing. In the meantime; however, the offender makes hundreds of choices each day and is responsible for choosing the "right" rather than the "wrong". With the use of a danger signal and other tools, the offender can be violation free and "different" right away.

The treatment contract includes the offender's agreement to maintain an "open channel" of communication, commit no legal violations or serious program offense, keep a daily record of "all" events and thinking, and practice using the concepts ("tools") learned during the sessions.

He also agrees to give the therapist control over his finances, use no alcohol/drugs/mood-altering substances, abstain from sexual intercourse, keep appointments and schedule a minimum of ten hours per day in routine, constructive activity. Limits on confidentiality are made explicit; as well as what authority the therapist will use, and not use, in program decisions about the offender.

IMPRESSIONS:

Adolescents are not known for self-discipline, a realistic view of themselves and the world, or steadiness of temperament; and this is also true of juvenile offenders. As strong as their fears or as sincere their desire to change, external controls are needed to support their decision to accept the program. Periods of disenchantment and boredom are better weathered when there is something tangible and significant to lose; and yet continued participation remains the offender's choice.

Establishing the facts such as violence in thought, commission of numerous and undetected crimes, and lying as a way of life; came quite easily with all of our students. This seemed due to their supreme confidence that agreement with their peers constituted proof that "everyone does it". There was also the self-serving aspect of "Being Honest", as it supported the view that they were basically okay kids who just get into trouble, once in a while.

The change agent's ability to tell the offender about himself and his life style did not seem to create a very strong impression of expertise. Indications that credibility was developing came as the therapist proved knowledgable about cut-off, super optimism and so-called impulsivity. Potency was enhanced after the denouement and as the agent struck the hard bargain of the treatment contract. With perfectionism and optimism, the students seemed to be "hooked" into meeting the challenge of getting the therapist's stamp of respectability;

and making the fastest and biggest change in town. This mind-set is the precursor of one of the early challenges to continuing the program, when the offender learns that there is no magic and how tedious "change" can be.

Although cheating in some form occurred in the log writing, the daily reporting is indispensable. The offender simply can not avoid giving himself away as he provides the context for that day's session. When the clinical notes of each session are shared as a matter of routine, the client has additional exposure to the therapist's point of view. This also has the effect of the therapist being able to get "the last word in", when control is an issue.

While minor disciplinary problems continued, their frequency was reduced by as much as nine times. No student broke the law or committed a serious offense while in the program. Serious incidents occurred only after the student officially terminated his contract. Meeting with the change agent on an almost daily basis and being held accountable for all choices seemed to act as an effective, immediate deterrent.

The greatest common resistance was shown when the offender was asked to consider the position of others (especially if others were girls or staff he disliked); and when asked to inventory the grief and harm he had done to others in the past. A frequent and hard fought counter-claim was that they had always thought of themselves first; that they didn't care about what others might need; and that to do so, is stupid.

Our experience in working with the concepts of Yochelson and Samenow is that the criminal profile provides an accurate description of the majority of the offenders in our population. The problems that seem heightened by the fact that they are also adolescents seem to be matters of therapeutic strategy. Some of the most apparent disadvantages could

be off-set by developing external controls in a setting where the staff share an internally consistent theoretical framework; and where all the members of the resident population are similarly involved in treatment intervention.